



Marriages in Anita Desai's Novels: Confinement, Oppression and Persecution of her Women.

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Abstract

Anita Desai is the most noteworthy voice in Indian English Literature, known for her deep psychological exploration of human relationships and the inner feelings of females. Marriage is one of the main theme in her novels, almost all the marriages in Desai's novels are resolved more or less in a business like matter. The present article shows how the marriageable daughters are handed over to the male partners without considering the intricacy of feelings and mental status of daughters. All the persecution of women differs and can be caused by emotional and psychological factors. Desai's novels habitually portrays women who struggle within patriarchal social structure. This article focus on particularly within the institution of marriage. Desai's heroines encounter traumatic experiences of married lives. I try to investigate that Anita Desai presents marriages not as a harmonious partnerships but alienation and loneliness of her women. Articles explores how marriages in Desai's novels function as spaces of confinements, oppression and persecution of her married women. Finally the article argues that each novel maintaining the basic features of marital discord in 'Cry the Peacock', 'Voices in the City', 'Fire on the Mountain' and 'Clear Light of the day'.

I. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the theme of marriage presented by Anita Desai brings out a very interesting fact that their women characters are weak, submissive and tortured, any chance they have of feeling happiness for herself is in the house of their husbands. Marriage has conventionally been regarded as a sacred institution. However, Desai challenges this idealized vision by presenting it as a structure agitated with limitations and psychological oppression for women. Desai indirectly suggests women to either remain unmarried, unfettered and unaccepted by the society or marry and be

condemned to everlasting hell. Anita's novels consistently portray women who involve in emotional neglect, loss of identity and social subjugation within marriage. Desai's fiction focuses on the emotional experiences of women who struggle to reconcile personal desires with social expectations. Her novels frequently show the tension between societal expectations and women's desires. Her novels reflect women are tortured and impelled for dowry, barrenness or simply for not being as modern as their partners would want them to be. The article examines how Desai's novels constitute marriage as a space of oppression, persecution

and confinement for women. It took four novels of Anita Desai to highlight how marital relationships often conduce to neglect and existential despair.

II. AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The aim of this article is to critically examine how marriages in Anita Desai's novels function as institutionalized forms of oppression inflicted on women by their husbands, within the patriarchal structures of Indian society. Through detailed analysis of key texts like *Cry, the Peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Voices in the City* and *Clear Light of the Day*, highlights the psychological repression, emotional starvation, and loss of identity experienced by female protagonists. The article also portrays marital disharmony as a tool of male domination, where husbands rationality, detachment, or infidelity erode women's self-esteem and autonomy.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have widely recognized Anita Desai's contribution to feminist discourse in Indian English literature. Meenakshi Mukherjee (1990), observes that Desai's novels focus on the "interior landscape" of her characters rather than external social action. Her female protagonists are often introspective individuals who experience intense psychological conflict. Jasbir Jain (1990), argues that Desai's fiction portrays women who are alienated from both society and their own domestic spaces. Marriage, which should ideally provide emotional security, becomes a source of anxiety and frustration. Madhusudan Prasad that emphasize that Desai's narratives explore the clash between individual identity and societal expectations. The female characters in her novels are frequently unable to express their true selves because patriarchal norms dictate their behavior. Although several studies discuss alienation and psychological conflict in Desai's works, fewer studies specifically examine the institution of marriage as a form of persecution. This article therefore attempts to analyze marriage as a central mechanism through which females oppression are represented in her novels.

IV. DISCUSSION

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, The Peacock* sets the pattern for other novels to be followed with the central theme of marital, discord and its impact, particularly on women. The problem is succinctly revealed through the marital relation of Gautama and Maya. Other couples are also the victims of this self-created tragedy. Maya's marriage with Gautama was more or less a marriage of convenience. Gautama and Maya's father were friends to each other. They have a similar way of thinking. Gautama used to come to Maya's father.

"Coming slowly up on his bicycle, in the evenings, it was my father Gautama used to come to call upon and had it not been for the quickening passion with which I met. half way, my father's proposal that I marry this tall, and knowledgeable friend of his, one might have said that our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than anything else".

Since they have different temperaments, they drift apart through the very process of their living together. Had they followed the usual procedure of an ordinary marriage that turns the partners into weary strangers in course of time, there would have been nothing amiss. But a Desai heroine cannot succumb to such circumstances. She tries to preserve the deep, torturous love for Gautama with childish pleadings, "Is there nothing". I whispered, 'is there nothing in you that should be touched ever so slightly, if I told you, I live my life for you?' This involvement in her and the complete lack of it in Gautama is the basis of the maladjustment that creates the fear-complex in Maya. From an ordinary pampered hypersensitive child-bride, Maya is transformed within four years of married life into a neurotic, homicidal maniac through the grinding process of mindless compromise with her marriage, which was doomed to fail, right from the beginning.

The drumbeats claim her at last, to thrust her young life into the twilight hours of

insanity, within the black bars of an asylum. This tragedy happens without any ill-intention on the part of either Gautama or Maya. Gautama had been a dutiful, clear-headed provider. In his own say, he loved Maya, even though he was exasperated with her childish tantrums, Maya

" he said, patiently, "Do sit down. You look so hot and worn out. You need a cup of tea," "Lying here in the dark?" he said, and drew a finger down my cheek", "Come, come", he said, and took out the handkerchief again, more stained than ever. "Do get up", he said. "The servants are coming to take the beds out for the night, and really, it is much pleasanter outside. Wipe your face. and we'll go out, Maya." Her heart soared with that ecstatic pain of all-consuming love..."

Whatever marriage has been referred to in *Cry, the Peacock* are not contented marriages in true sense of the term. Maya is greatly shocked at the apathy, hypocrisy and hatred revealed through other marriages around her. Her own mother is absent. Maya does not even mention a photograph or any conversation with her father about her mother. It seems that it might have been a painful and disgusting episode in her father's life. So he might be hiding it from Maya. Gautama's parents also lived an unnatural married life. Each one kept himself or herself busy with his or her vocation. We notice an apathetical approach between them and can be interpreted as persecution at the mental and emotional levels.

Leila. Maya's friend, married a T.B. (tuberculosis) patient for love. She rages and raves at the mockery of the marriage, yet tolerates all childish vagaries of her husband. Mrs. and Mr. Lall are pen-portraits of hypocrisy personified and Mrs. Leila reveals it in no uncertain terms. The Sikh wife publicly denounces her husband as a charlatan and opportunist, revealing the deep-seated antipathy of a maladjusted marriage. Nila, a divorcee, declares: "*After ten years with that rabbit I married. I've learnt to do everything myself.*". Even plum, pampered Pom complains petulantly against Kailash who is not ready to give in to her wish for having a separate house of their own. Mrs. Sapru, who comes to Maya's

father as a client to plead tearfully for her case, receives disdain and criticism for herself though Mr. Sapru is blamed more for having lost his control over the affairs.

Marriages point out that qualities and vices, abilities and weaknesses, plus points and minus points of brides and bridegrooms have not been carefully and intentionally balanced. Similarities between the attitudes of both husband and wife to life and such things in general play important roles in making their conjugal life successful. Marriage is a sacred institution in India. It is to be lived very carefully and thoughtfully. General situations in society are such that no proper time or thought is given to these affairs. The results are the clashes, desperation, separation and loneliness. Women who are treated casually become victims of these clashes. Their dependability and traditional approach to them cause alienation in their lives. They struggle against strong, negative, soul-killing circumstances but in vain. They become hopeless, distraught and nervous. They find a solutions by committing suicide or running away or living separately. The fact that Maya ultimately turns insane and kills her husband may contain an indirect comment on their different values of life.

Anita Desai's next novel "*Voices in the City*" presents a strange and incongruous picture of a conjugal life through Nirode's parents. It is a marriage of convenience. Nirode's father prides himself on his family name and title, whereas his mother prides on her tea estates and house. Both the partners in *Voices in the City* are capable of soul-destroying hatred and terrific fury towards each other. In Maya's case, the neurosis is uncontrolled and involuntary, with Nirode's father, it is a process of deliberate physical and spiritual destruction. The marital disharmony transforms Nirode's parents into mental monsters. The father turns into a drunkard, debased and dishonorable creature absolutely different from an easy-going, sport-loving and fond father. The mother is transformed from a sweet, sensitive, accomplished beauty into a coldly, practical and possessive woman having no human warmth and tenderness even for her own children. Amla's observations about her parents'

disharmonious conjugal relationship are explicit. She tells Dharma,

"I saw such terrible contempt and resentment in her eyes.....when he came to Kalimpong.....he never followed her. He used to lie back against his cushions, idle and contented-contented I think, in his malice."

We remember Dante's Purgatory while going through these pages. We find this tracking more fearsome than Dante's Purgatory. It envelopes and destroys two lives continuously, all day, each day, pursuing them step by step. This may be understood as another form of persecution of marriage.

Monisha and Jiban's have married even though nothing in common in each other's personality. It is the most pathetic illustration of maladjustment in marriage. Anita puts it very poignantly when she involvement and soul-crushing apathy. Monisha's tortuous journey towards her horrible death presents her spiritual and physical transformation in black mourning colors. Monisha is transformed from a quite sensitive, mild, self-centered, beautiful girl into a barren, neurotic, diary-writing woman. *"Her head....was like that of a stuffed rag doll with a very white face nodding insecurely on its neck, its eyebrows and mouth painted unnaturally dark."*

After her marriage, Monisha became an integral part of Jiban's family; however, she is accused of stealing Jiban's money. After her death it is Jiban who gently covers the charred body and begs forgiveness from her relatives. Her death at last severed the bonds that mutilated her soul and body in life and she is taken away, unaccompanied by them, in peace.

The questions that arise in our minds are persecution and maladjustment in marriage mean such a great menace that everything is powerless before it? Does it then drive back all efforts to lead a free life and bring out the hidden quicksand of oppression of human rights? When two humans come together through marriage some sort of difference is bound to be there. But the marriages settled blindly and without considering the attitudes, feelings and outlooks of the brides and bridegrooms are bound to fail. Proper

understanding of each other, a sense of wisdom and love for each other can make their conjugal lives successful. But Indian male-dominated families expect the women to adjust. Adverse attitudes of the family members, hostile social traditions and backgrounds make these maladjustments a great menace. Anita Desai has presented marital disharmonies as they exist in Indian male-dominated families. Aunt Leila hates men, particularly her fat and self-satisfied, long dead husband. Her daughter Rita has lived through a spectacularly short-lived marriage. Sonny's two sisters Lila and Rina present pathetic spectacles: Lila had married for a title and lived now in squalid penury, in a crumbling house in which she took in paying guests who drank or wrote her insulting letters.

Similarly, Jit Nair and Sarla have an intense distrust and disgust for each other. For Mr. Basu, Mrs. Basu is an attractive plaything. He suffers her whims as long as they are not too unpalatable. Arun's wife, the nurse who lives on a world of medicines, has large and rough hands. She has nothing in common with him. Dharma frankly confesses that married relationships are never straightforward and made to order. Sonny's father admits with a noisy laughter, "Babulpur was there for my wife, and for the occasional visit to reassure the tenants, so to speak." The quiet, little Professor Bose is more like a domestic animal who runs at the first sign of any unusual happening and trots to his wife and her hilsa fish, cooked in strong mustard oil. Through these illustrations, Anita Desai suggest that marriage is best, a farce, at worst it is a malignancy that destroys the body, the mind and the soul completely.

Anita Desai's *'Fire on the Mountain'* and *'Clear Light of the day'* brings out the problems of marital disharmony as a basic ingredient for disintegrating family life. Nanda Kaul rejoices at least at the beginning of her secluded, loveless, and attachmentless life. She has accepted this after undergoing consistent mental torturing and bitter experiences of a married life. She has a strong reason for her determination. The lifelong faithlessness of Mr. Kaul to Nanda Kaul and the hypocritical situation force her to accept this seclusion. This marriage was purely based on physical lust and circumstantial convenience for the man. Nanda Kaul becomes

a mother of many unwanted, unloved children. She always arranges the dinner table as a hard-working hostess. Outwardly everything seems to be smooth; but inwardly Nanda Kaul burns with a fire of frustration. On the contrary, Mr. Kaul keeps his beloved Miss Davidson on the teaching staff. He invites her for badminton parties, drops her back at night and comes back secretly to his separate bedroom. Nanda Kaul keeps the frozen smile on her face. She looks after the family, his children his house, shutting the doors, supervising cooks and servants; putting the visitors at ease and waiting, always waiting with a singular, burning, soul-destroying hatred for her husband and to stop all these permanently, she desires a blessed widowhood, the absolute solitude without man and children around. She gets such a dreamed house at Kassauli. The death of her husband is the death of her jailer. It brings her the long laboured freedom from the condemned cell of spiritual annihilation.

Nanda Kaul's grand-daughter. Tara, suffers a terrible fate of a chronic breakdown as a result of her marital discord. The two married couples, who resided at Carignano earlier, present pictures of totally confused and maladjusted married life. Colonel Macdongall, a companion and nurse maid to this sickly wife and children waiting resignedly for death, looking out to the cemetery and the terrified Pastor and his mad, killer of a wife, whose entire life is a race between the hunter and the hunted. Another bitterly tragic, unhappy marriage is that of Ila Das.

In Clear Light of the Day the disharmony takes its cue from a chronic physical ailment of the wife. It suffocates the whole family with a morbid and fearful atmosphere. The heavy cloud of unrelieved gloom accompanying the hopeless efforts of a diabetic woman to lead a normal life alienated her from her husband and children and enveloped them all around. "She did not like exercise perhaps not the new baby either. Her whole marriage was a card-house, an anemic reproduction in faded watercolors of a flesh and blood marriage. Nobody remembers her after death. Raja and Tara escaped in marriage. Bim stayed on more because of necessity than by choice to look after her disabled brother. Baba. Baba the mentally

undeveloped was the most pathetic victim of a marriage in which the parents could not care for minor happenings as long as these did not disturb their club-visits or card-sessions. Tara and Bakul's married life is similar to the married life of Maya and Gautama; but it shows a lesser degree of frenzy and disturbance. Tara is comparatively sound than Maya and Bakul is not as deprived in emotion as Gautama. But the marital disharmony touches the same nerve-points.

"He even came close to her and touched her cheek, very lightly, as if he could hardly bear the unpleasant contact but forced himself to do it out of compassion.... She felt that she had followed him enough, it had been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her again, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse."

It was a marriage of convenience for both; Bakul, a junior diplomat wanted a young bride to be moulded according to his needs. Tara intensely desired to escape from the dark, disease-ridden house into the glittering world of youth, laughter and comforts. Love was not at all the point of consideration in their married life. Both of them accepted marriage as a form of biological need. no more, no less. It was a wonderfully practical and peaceful marriage. But finally, it defeated its own purpose. Tara's spiritual emptiness haunted her but being the wife of a diplomat, she dealt with it with diplomacy and practical sense.

Aunt Mira's married life was more a sinister portrayal of a social taboo than marital disharmony in the real sense. But this basic rejection created havoc in her personality and was the root cause of insecurity and alienation from life in later stages. Her transformation into a mentally-disordered alcoholic is the final blow that sealed her fate that consistently refused to smile on her. The Mishra daughters. Jaya and Sarla, belong to the "once married" category, used and thrown away like old piece of comfortless furniture. Raja married Benazir more for her property. Bin clearly indicates the fact that theirs is not an ideally happy union.

A study of Anita Desai's novels are always a soul-searching process for her readers. She forces her readers to be completely honest and sincere as she herself is. She fearlessly puts forward the point that the basic concept of marriage is a Social Contract Theory, based on human convenience and biological needs. All her heroines and heroes disassociate the factor of love from the concept of marriage. The question of self-destruction of an individual to the dictates of a group forms the main aspect of every marriage. So the element of human situation and its destructive influence on the characters especially on female characters is significant. The characters struggle with their hard destinies in the shape of maladjustment in married life.

V. CONCLUSION

Anita Desai's novels dispense a profound critique of the institution of marriage in patriarchal society. She forces her readers to be completely honest and sincere. She fearlessly puts forward the point that the basic concept of marriage is a social contract theory, based on human convenience and biological needs. By highlighting the hidden realities of women's domestic lives, Anita exposes the emotional neglect, isolation, loss of identity, alienation and psychological breakdown that her women characters experience within marital relationships. Her novels serve as both literary art and social critique of the institution shedding light on the weak women body, mind and soul are destroyed after marriages. Desai challenges the idealized perception of marriage and reveals its potential to become a site of persecution. Her work therefore contributes significantly to feminist discourse in Indian English literature.

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